

Racial Equity, Social Vulnerability and Community Partnerships

Introduction

The recommendations provided by the team focused on Racial Equity, Social Vulnerability and Strategic Partnerships and Coalitions center around the development of strategic and effective partnerships. The purpose of these partnerships is to raise awareness, stimulate and amplify collective action, and facilitate integrated actions that reduce emissions and build resiliency through a primary lens of equity where our community's most vulnerable or marginalized are prioritized. This group also attempted to identify innovative funding strategies to support the development and maintenance of these partnerships/coalitions.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Build Strategic Partnerships to Meaningfully Engage Frontline / Underserved / Vulnerable Communities
2. Integrate Climate & Energy Justice into County Systems
3. Ensure Funding Sources for Climate Change Work

Recommendations

1. **Build Strategic Partnerships to Meaningfully Engage Frontline / Underserved / Vulnerable Communities as Owners of Climate Action & Resilience Plan**
 - a. Coordinate inclusive and well-resourced process for feedback/participation from underserved and structurally vulnerable communities, so that community members have ownership in the evolving CARP
 - Meet communities where they are at and seek ideas and engagement that will advance ownership for underserved residents, and develop out CARP in a way that lifts up diverse cultures of Montgomery County rather than targeting outcomes that will perpetuate inequities and conformity
 - Recognize that specific goals of CARP will not align with community priorities, and an equitable CARP requires intersectional work at the County level & at MCPS that advances community priorities around housing, education, policing reform and other key issues
 - b. Engage key stakeholders for implementation of Climate Justice Conversations
 - c. Resource community members to engage and integrate their feedback with services and stipends - such as participation and transportation stipends, childcare, food

- d. Develop network to sustain community outreach and engagement, inclusive of diverse Montgomery County communities and not limited to engaged and better-resourced residents. Possible names: Community CAN (Climate Action Network) or Community CARE (Climate Action & Racial Equity) Network
 - e. Build visibility campaign to communicate Montgomery County values and action on equity to residents
 - f. Develop metrics that demonstrate accountability to inform residents of climate goals, progress and benefits
2. **Integrate Climate & Energy Justice into County Systems**
- a. Integrate across functions (Hiring, Staff training, Procurement, Development, etc)
 - b. Integrate across service areas (DHHS, MCPS, DEP, Recreation, etc)
 - c. Practices & processes integrate Climate & Energy Justice (eg. into Equity training for county staff)
 - d. Seek informed partners
 - e. Recognize the County's own internal Challenges (eg. Information Silos) and external Threats (eg. federal/national anti-Immigrant chilling effect) undermining engagement of diverse communities
 - f. Reform development process in Montgomery County for sustainable outcomes that promote real community engagement & power, and improved environmental & health outcomes
 - g. Use a deep intersectional Systems Change approach, building on recent work towards dedicated progress on racial equity & social justice
3. **Ensure Funding Sources for Climate Change work**
- a. Utilize traditional and innovative means
 - b. Allocate budget to programs (e.g. Racial Justice Office, Minority Initiatives) engaging communities on climate as well as programs within agencies that support decentralized equity work - without prioritizing funding to both resource County capacity and engagement of community members, we cannot achieve the systems change necessary to lead on an equitable energy future that benefits all and includes all Montgomery County communities
 - c. Create sustainable funding workgroup

The recommendations provided by this group of the highest near-term priority include:

- Fund equity work and prioritize expanding funding and exploring new funding opportunities. Equitable outcomes can't be achieved without government capacity and the resources for stakeholders from underserved communities to participate in developing the plan and engagement process
 - Determine which agency / wing of government will own the community engagement process - DEP in partnership with Racial Equity Office & Community Partnerships Office? Racial Equity Office highlights importance of decentralization in this work so that all agencies are building core competencies

- Ensure that the County selects at least one consultant with energy justice expertise (through a racial equity lens) in the next phase of this process
- Start the process of deep community engagement and continuous feedback *now* -- take the first steps towards working with equity partners on a well-resourced process for input and participation from underserved communities on the evolving Climate Action & Resilience Plan and a resiliency study, and begin to connect engaged community members and key stakeholders through a first version of a Climate Action Network / Community CARE Network
 - Engage Ethnic Advisory Committee Members, MORE Network, Racial Equity & Social Justice Committee
- Provide context and support for Racial Equity & Social Justice Office to incorporate elements of climate & energy justice into intersectional training curriculum for all County Employees & Advisory Committee Members (key stakeholders in an inclusive process)
- Launch efforts to reform the development process through an equity lens -- calls for its own workgroup

The workgroup recommends that the County consider these key considerations in building, implementing, and evolving an equitable Climate Action & Resilience Plan (CARP):

- **SYSTEMS CHANGE IS KEY** to building a racially and socially just Montgomery County that leads on decisive, game-changing action to address the climate crisis, mitigate the impacts, protect our environment, and improve the health of our communities.

Build on the work of the Racial Equity & Social Justice Act and consider:

- If our expectations are larger than the deliverables for the County and residents and the resources to get there, then we're not committing to real systems change that will stop perpetuating inequity and speed our transition to a cleaner, greener County for all.
- Development is KEY to the systems change solution, and also a major challenge in terms of aligning different stakeholders on what Montgomery County needs. We need to urgently address how the planning and zoning department moves forward with a view on racial justice and climate equity. This is a far bigger issue than we can capture here and calls for its own workgroup -- resourcing community members who would not have the resources to participate otherwise.
- Major investments in public transit are also key to improving quality of life for vulnerable community residents.

- There's already been a tremendous amount of great work at the national level led by frontline communities to enact and implement legislation, and build policy guidance and scorecards. Mine the work that has already been done while working closely with local communities on local solutions. See resources below.
- Montgomery County needs to plan for the impacts of automation on jobs - - to support innovation while ensuring a just transition and economic protection for impacted workers.
- **SEEK INFORMED PARTNERS** At least one consultant the County works with on the Climate Action Plan should have the following energy justice skills. Other consultants should take leadership from County experts on equity:
 - An intersectional lens to community-driven solutions and a racial justice focus
 - An understanding of [The Jemez Principles for democratic organizing](#)
 - A background in the fundamentals of environmental justice and energy burden -- including the impacts of extractive development and pollution on frontline communities, and the higher percent of income low-income families must spend on utility bills
- **WORK INTERSECTIONALLY** People of color in Montgomery County represent close to 50% of the County's population, and experience significantly worse outcomes across many areas of policy. To pursue progress in climate and energy equity, the County must move forward from institutionalizing racial equity and social justice towards intersectional policy improvements that will target closing these gaps while bettering the lives of all residents. See the statistics and recommendations from the [Racial Equity Profile](#).
- **ENGAGE IN A WELL-RESOURCED INCLUSIVE PROCESS** The County must prioritize near-term investments in funding deep equity work, including resourcing community members to engage in an inclusive process on evolving the Climate Action Plan in development.
 - Our new Racial Equity & Social Justice Office is moving us in the right direction. The asks from the County for this office's expertise in the near-term will far exceed the capacity supported by the budget for this office. If Montgomery County wants to truly commit to the work ahead, the office needs to be well-resourced with sufficient FTE count and budget to support deep community engagement work.

- Underserved community members have been OVER-surveyed and under-resourced to engage in surveying and assessments, and have not consistently received follow-up on how their participation made an impact and what changed. As well, these communities are often asked to deliver information, input, guidance, or leadership on a timeline that does not align with their priorities. A truly inclusive process will take time, dedicated coordination, and services, which requires funding and resources.
- When considering how to engage community members, the County should prioritize not only well-resourced engagement but meeting people where they already gather / connect, and in ways that are meaningful for them to participate while providing direct benefits to them beyond necessary support like stipends, and transportation and childcare help. For example, the Latino Health Initiative partnered with Corazon Latino for forest bathing walks for their volunteers, many of whom grew up in rural Central America with deep connection to the land. These experiences were deeply meaningful for participants and sparked emotional conversations.
- The County should also *learn* from diverse community approaches and traditions around environmental protection and community organizing, and evolve the CARP accordingly so that the CARP does not perpetuate structural oppression that centers a particular way of organizing and acting. This includes cultivating people within government who represent historically oppressed communities to bring culturally resonant values and approaches to their work, and building an inclusive environment in government that lifts up these values and approaches -- and questioning where existing systems and structures may be driving conformity that serves and reflects a white middle-class.
- Underserved residents include people who have been deprived of a voice and power in the policymaking process, and the County should make thoughtful efforts to engage through working with well-resourced cultural liaisons -- people who can serve as effective messengers. Sending in representatives who organize like white middle-class people will not result in effective engagement that gives diverse communities ownership in the CARP.
- Acting on climate simply isn't a priority or even well-understood in many families and communities. An inclusive process means deep engagement with well-resourced stakeholders who can serve as messengers and educators in their communities on how climate action can benefit people, and what they will get out of participating in the evolving work on CARP. A message of "zero emissions" doesn't bear importance for many

families, but outcomes like lowering utility bills, protecting family health by cutting pollution, and cultivating ownership in local development may be more resonant.

- The County has a number of Ethnic Advisory Groups, and a Faith and Seniors Advisory Group that are already engaged to advise the County Executive on meeting the needs of our diverse community. These advisory group members should be key stakeholders in the process going forward.
- Impact Silver Spring has also launched the MORE Network for racial equity, and the MORE Network should be continually engaged while County coordinators on the CARP continue to engage with MORE on advancing MORE's other priorities.
- Treat the CARP as a *living* policy guide that should be continually updated with continuous feedback from community engagement.
- **TARGET COMMUNICATION AND BENEFITS APPROPRIATELY** The County should target / tailor communication efforts and benefits appropriately to differing audiences. Underserved community members should be primary beneficiaries and invited to learn how changes will benefit them and only asked to participate if resourced to do so. Community members with comparatively more privilege and resources should be given opportunities to step up and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable Montgomery County.
 - Our County's many passionate advocacy groups for climate and environmental progress are mostly engaging white residents, and that includes this Climate Workgroup. The technical workgroup process has not provided stipends or other resources for participation such as childcare, leaving many residents out of being able to engage.
 - Our community engagement should not only include residents who are charged up around climate changemaking, but treat all Montgomery County communities as vital to the conversation, engaging schools, faith congregations, non-profits, businesses, cultural groups, civic associations, medical associations, arts groups, and more.
 - Equity issues are not synonymous with issues of class / socioeconomic status. We have a wide range of equity issues that may impact residents at all incomes. Racism, sexism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, barriers for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, and more issues intersect with class issues, and impact residents in many

different ways.

- **BE REAL ABOUT THE CHALLENGES FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES**

Montgomery County has made strong commitments to inclusive values in the current federal era. Despite efforts to date by the County to communicate these values, the federal government's policies and treatment have endangered many residents, including immigrants, communities of color, LGBTQ communities, and people with disabilities and chronic health conditions. The damage has been done. We need to be realistic about the challenges involved in engaging communities -- and that we must meet these challenges with a ferocious justice response. We are continuing on a journey to build a better Montgomery County for all, and we have a long way to go.

- Immigrant communities in particular feel under threat and at risk when engaging with official government initiatives and police. Between fear-mongering on the census and policies that have ripped apart families such as our El Salvadorian residents, some Montgomery County residents are choosing to not engage with or drop out of programs and opportunities designed to benefit them. Attendance has gone down at family reunification and health intervention workshops.
 - Education, criminal justice, and policing reform are key priorities for racial equity in the County, and achieving reform goals led by black and brown residents are vital to the health and safety of our residents, as well as building a county where more people of color can participate in sustainability. We must view all these issues and challenges as intersectional.
 - Climate and energy justice work and education in the County must continue to directly address the history and current surge of white supremacy, the racial disparities in generational wealth, the legacy of redlining which lines up with the current sites of environmental justice communities, and the systemic exclusion of people of color from choice over their energy sources and democratic participation in building the energy system.
- **DON'T SILO!** Silos in government and in our community challenge our collective ability to achieve real progress. The County must continually seek to identify and remove barriers to communication and collaboration.
 - Siloing happens when one arm of the County government isn't aware and informed on what another arm is doing that impacts their work.

- Siloing *also* happens when the right people aren't consulted on how policy can have negative outcomes even if the intentions are equitable. For example, creating a policy to benefit underserved residents, but missing that the structure is not in place for residents to demonstrate that they meet its rigorous requirements. Or taxing products mostly used by lower-income residents in order to supposedly benefit the same residents. Be cautious and mindful in how policies will be implemented and who will be impacted.